

## **Beijing Adventures**

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to travel to Beijing as a part of Team Alcott – supporting 17-year old Wheelchair Sports Victoria athlete Dylan Alcott. Dylan was Victoria's sole male representative in the Australian Rollers Men's Wheelchair Basketball team, and making his Paralympic debut. The opportunity also meant that I could catch up with other Victorian and Australian athletes in Beijing, so a chance too good to knock back.

The trip got off to a spectacular start with the Opening Ceremony, thanks firstly to BHP Billiton for some great hospitality and seats, and secondly to the Beijing Organising Committee for staging the most amazing show. To witness many performers with a disability, thousands of other colourful performers and the most awe inspiring lighting of an Olympic or Paralympic flame ever could be topped by only one thing – the arrival of the Australian Paralympic Team. It was a long wait with the team coming into the stadium third last, but it was well worth the wait and the signal that the Games had truly begun. For our Wheelchair Sports Victoria athletes, this was the real start of their Beijing Paralympic campaign.

Following Dylan and the Australian Rollers was a bit of a roller coaster at times. A heart stopping one point victory in their first game with 4.4 seconds left over Brazil was an exciting, but scary start to their competition. This was followed by some convincing wins over China and Great Britain before another nail biter and come from behind victory of the under rated Israel. This set the show for a final pool game against the might of the USA, which saw the Rollers go down fighting, but still finish as the number one ranked team in their pool. That was a great result and meant missing defending two time Paralympic champions Canada until the Gold Medal game.

Three wins to go in order to take home Gold... Win one came against Japan in the Quarter Finals. Win two against Great Britain in the Semi Finals. And win three, the most significant of them all, came with a convincing win over Canada to snatch the Gold Medal – only Australia's second ever in Paralympic competition. To witness the Australian flag being raised in Beijing and to sing Advance Australia Fair with the Rollers in the change rooms after the game will be one of the proudest moments I will experience in my lifetime.

In addition to being able to experience a simply incredible Paralympic and Olympic city in Beijing, we were able to take in some of Beijing's famous tourist destinations such as The Great Wall of China, the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square. The city of Beijing is certainly a city to visit if ever you plan to travel to China.

While in Beijing, I was able to meet a number of key sport and government representatives from both home and abroad, and establish some great connections for Wheelchair Sports Victoria to develop in the future. Meeting the Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities Bill Shorten was one such person. Bill was returning from Beijing and just talking with him and seeing the passion and excitement he expressed was a positive sign that the Federal Government is not only aware of the amazing achievements of our Paralympic athletes, but that they want to see more people support our athletes in the future.

One of the staggering statistics that I learnt while in Beijing was that China has more than 88 million people living with a disability – that is four times the population of Australia. The Games of Beijing have made some quantum leaps in recognising both the needs of people with a disability, such as accessibility and improved education, but more importantly, being able to celebrate the achievements of the Paralympic athletes of the world. The Games will leave a legacy for the next generation of China and people worldwide.

Thanks to Dylan's family and support team for the opportunity to travel with them to Beijing and share the golden moment first hand. With London 2012 only four years away, there is already so much to look forward to for our Paralympians and Wheelchair Sports Victoria.

To those Paralympians that may be retiring following Beijing, congratulations on some amazing performances. To those current athletes, or our junior and aspiring athletes looking towards London 2012, best of luck for the next four years of hard work, effort and success. All of Wheelchair Sports Victoria looks forward to supporting you on your journeys...

Greg Warnecke  
Director

### **Images of Australian Paralympic athletes**

Serena Corporate Photography was the official photographer for the Australian Paralympic Committee at the recent Beijing Paralympic Games. Should you wish to view or purchase images of any Australian athlete from the Games, please email Serena - [serenaphoto@optusnet.com.au](mailto:serenaphoto@optusnet.com.au) to request access to her secure website and for information on pricing and usage rights. Alternatively Serena can be contacted on 0411 327 877.